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SUBJECT: Niyazov Makes Massive Purges over Agriculture Fiasco;
Ensures Local Elections a Sham

Refs: a) 05 Ashgabat 1363;
b) Ashgabat 1182;
c) Ashgabat 1055;
d) Ashgabat 1183;
e) Ashgabat 0309

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Summary and Comment

¶1. (SBU) Turkmenistan's President Niyazov on November 27, conducted a massive purge of high-ranking officials, rivaling, if not surpassing, the oil and gas purge of December 2005 (ref a). Responding to allegations by Minister of Agriculture Esenmyrat Orazgeldiyev during an October 25 meeting (ref b) that statistics for cotton and wheat production had been falsified, Niyazov ordered an investigation, and on November 27 purged the following:

--Wheat Association Chairman, Begmyrat Tajiiev (whose responsibilities were assumed by Minister of Agriculture Orazgeldiyev),

-- Lebap Welayat (province) Governor Ovezdurdy Chashayev, and

-- Dashoguz Welayat Governor Aganiyaz Akyev (ref c).

Continuing on November 29, Niyazov purged:

-- Mary Welayat Governor Hojaberdi Byashimov, thereby concluding a clean sweep of the country's five provincial governors within the space of a month.

¶2. Also on November 27, Niyazov appointed three new etrap (district) governors less than a week before Turkmenistan's citizens vote on December 3 for their new etrap-level people's councils (ref d) and directed that these new bodies would confirm his appointees, brazenly ensuring the elections won't amount to shucks. End Summary.

First Round of Purges

¶3. (SBU) On October 25, President Niyazov purged the governors of Balkan and Ahal provinces and criticized Orazgeldiyev for the inadequate cotton harvest. Orazgeldiyev, in turn, "warned" the president of a looming agricultural crisis saying that officials had been covering up shortfalls by falsifying sowing and production statistics in the wheat and cotton harvests, prompting the president to order an investigation. Lebap Welayat officials subsequently told visiting emboff that they had been working seven days a week to physically survey and verify the amount of land planted with wheat.

Round Two

¶4. (U) On November 27, the president held a special government meeting on agricultural issues. Noting that he had been told that Lebap and Dashoguz provinces had completed 100% of the planned winter wheat planting, Niyazov said that, according to the investigation, actual sowing had reached only 40% in Lebap and 32% in Dashoguz. Throughout Turkmenistan, planting of winter wheat had totaled only 43% of planned amounts, meaning that Turkmenistan could not meet its flour needs, even if the harvest was a good one. He called on provincial heads to plant as much winter wheat as possible by December 1, and to make up the remaining deficit by planting barley and rice. He also called for the wheat production plan for 2007 to be increased by an additional 20%.

¶5. (SBU) Noting that falsification of statistics was a criminal offense, Niyazov noted that none of those responsible for the bad statistics would be charged immediately. However, he made a number of major personnel shifts, including:

-- Wheat Association Chairman Begmyrat Tajiyev was fired.

-- Lebap Province Governor Ovezdurdy Chashayev, having held this position for 13 months, was demoted to the position of Governor of

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Galkynysh District; he was replaced by Deputy Lebap Governor Tagaymyrat Mammedov (bio para 10).

-- Dashoguz Province Governor Aganiyaz Akyev was removed after 11 months to be appointed to what Niyazov termed "the most difficult" farmers' association; he was replaced by the Chairman of the Food Industry Association, Saparmurat Ashirov (bio para 11).

-- On November 29, Mary Province Governor Hojaberdi Byashimov was also fired for falsifying grain sowing statistics after serving for 13 months; he was replaced by his deputy, Muhammet Akyevich Gurbanazarov (bio para 12).

-- Ashirov, the new Governor of Dashoguz, will be replaced as Chairman of the Food Industry Association by Nokerguly Atagulyev.

-- Deputy Minister of Oil and Gas Toymyrat Hangeldiyevich Hudayberdiyev (a former employee of the Ministry of National Security, Turkmenistan's KGB) was appointed a Deputy Governor of Lebap in order to serve as the new governor's "control over law and order."

-- The Head of Galkynysh Etrap in Lebap, Rozybayev Narguly, was demoted to become a chairman of a farmers' association and was replaced by former Lebap Governor Chashayev.

-- The Head of Saragt Etrap in Ahal, Begench Atamyradov (a former Minister of Agriculture) was fired and threatened with imprisonment; Orazgeldi Nurlyev will serve in his place.

-- Kabayev Sapardurdy, Head of Saparmyrat Turkmenbashy Etrap in Dashoguz was fired and was replaced by Begli Halmedov, a former Deputy Head of Akdepe Etrap.

-- The Head of Garabogazgol Etrap in Balkan Province, Mammedov Sapargeldi, was replaced by Myratgylych Garajykov, the etrap's chief engineer.

The president directed that the new etrap-level people's councils being elected on December 3 should reconfirm his new etrap governors.

Last Year - Gas, This Year - Wheat, Next Year -?

¶6. (SBU) As with charges of corruption last year that led to the gutting of the energy sector, this year's "falsification scandal" is an opportunity for Niyazov to make others take the fall for his own-doomed-to-failure policies. Is there a crisis in agriculture? Yes, not only because the president has set impossible-to-meet quotas, but also because the policy itself of agricultural self-sufficiency is irrational:

-- President Niyazov's promise in 1995 to provide almost-free bread and flour to Turkmenistan's citizens have led to mechanical increases every year in Turkmenistan's planned production figures in order to keep Turkmenistan's hypothetically rapidly growing population supplied with bread. This has led to a wheat production target in 2007 of 4.2 million tons, a figure far in excess of the one million tons that most believe is the limit of what Turkmenistan realistically can produce (or needs).

-- President Niyazov's decision to close down agricultural research institutes has contributed to a sharp decline in agricultural expertise in Turkmenistan and the elimination of the institutions tasked with protecting the quality of Turkmenistan's seed stock, leading to increasingly poor seeds.

-- Increasing desertification and a shortage of arable land has led to a practice of using the same fields to grow both cotton and wheat that has leached nutrients from the fields and led to decreasing yields.

Downward Spiral in Wheat Production

¶7. (SBU) Turkmenistan now reportedly is not producing enough flour

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to satisfy its domestic needs. Five months after the reportedly 3.5 million ton bumper wheat harvest (Comment: Probably also falsified data. End Comment), state granaries -- and even Turkmenistan's strategic wheat reserves, which have been raided for years to make up for declining wheat production -- are almost empty. A Mary source told emboff that the official in charge of the strategic stores there sought to commit suicide when he was charged with corruption because an investigation of his stores demonstrated that they had been almost totally depleted by provincial officials. Unfortunately, the shortages have also contributed to increasingly major shortfalls in seed stock; a Balkan Welayat contact told emboff that only 20% of Balkan's planned wheat crop had been sown; there was not enough wheat seed available to sow the rest.

¶8. (SBU) These shortages are being felt most by Turkmenistan's poorest citizens, who depend most on this element of President Niyazov's "social contract." Rationed flour is supposed to be sold for 2,000 Manat (about \$.05) and a loaf of rationed bread costs 1,000 Manat (about \$.025). However, with the shortages, the costs have risen not only for the state-subsidized products, but also, in many areas, for the more expensive flour imported from Kazakhstan. On November 3, emboffs observed long lines of people at 6:00 a.m. waiting for an 8:00 a.m. delivery of bread from state bakeries. A local resident told emboffs that the early-morning delivery would be the only one of the day, and that the supply was not sufficient to accommodate the demand.

Elections not Worth Shucks

¶9. (SBU) Niyazov's urging voters on November 27 to vote his appointees on December 3 renders local elections a farce, another meaningless spectacle aimed solely at self-glorification. Indeed, of the four new etrap heads, embassy has been able to confirm that only one, Orazgeldi Nurlyev of Saragt Etrap in Ahal, is even on the

roster of candidates for the elections.

Bio Data of New Hakims

¶10. (SBU) Tagaymyrat Mammedov is a 1993 alumnus of USDA's Cochran exchange program, and participated in an irrigation and water management program. Prior to 2004, he worked in Lebap Welayat's irrigation department, then as Chairman of the "Hojayish" Farmer's Association. In 2004, he became head of the "Watan" Joint Stock Company in Serdarabat Etrap of Lebap Province. He was promoted to the position of First Deputy Governor of Lebap Welayat in October ¶2005. Mammedov has met with embassy officials who describe him as informed and communicative (ref e). While on the Cochran, he had heart surgery in Bakersfield, CA and is fond of saying, "my heart is in Bakersfield!"

¶11. (U) Saparmyrat Ashirov was born in 1955 in Babadayhan Etrap of Ahal Welayat. He studied agronomy at Turkmen Agricultural University, graduating in 1978. From 1979-1982, he served as a science specialist at the Soil Research Institute, then as an instructor of the Gavers Etrap Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. From 1983 to 1986, he served as: Deputy Head of the Ashgabat Oblast Department of Agriculture, then head of section at the Gavers Etrap Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, then head of section at the Gavers Agriculture Complex, then head of the crop-raising department at the Ministry of Agriculture, then the head of the "Technoservis" production unit. From 1986 to 2004, he served as the Director of the John Deere Representative Office in Turkmenistan, head of the technical control section of the Rural Agricultural Service State Association (Turkmenobahyzmat), the head of the confectionary department of the Food Industry Association, and the Head of the fruit/vegetable processing department of the Food Industry Association. He has served as Chairman of the Food Industry Association since November, 2004.

¶12. (U) Muhammet Gurbannazarov was born in 1956 in Sakarchage Etrap, Mary Welayat. Upon his graduation from Turkmen State Agricultural University in 1978, he served in various positions within the Water Management Ministry until 2000. From 2000-2006, he served as Head of Sakarchage Etrap in Mary Welayat. After he served as First Deputy Hakim of Mary Welayat for only one month (he was

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promoted to this position in October 2006), the president again promoted him to replace Mary Welayat Governor Hojaberdi Byashimov.

Comment

¶13. (SBU) This purge is significant both for its breath-taking scope, all five provincial governors wiped out within a month, and its brazen contempt for local elections and the electoral structure Niyazov has been proselytizing in the national press. But the sad rationale remains the same, his state is failed and is crumbling from within, and he has to find someone else to blame. Amidst the rampant corruption, inefficiency, and deteriorating social system, Niyazov is making a yearly ritual of purging scapegoats for his own failures and paranoia, thereby casting himself as the one remaining paragon of virtue and wisdom. The personalities and issues involved are essentially irrelevant. End Comment.